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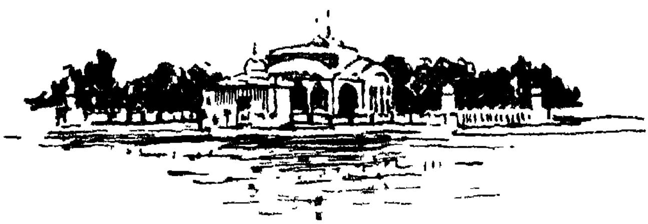
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Published on the Occasion of
The 2500th Anniversary of the Nirvana of Mahavira

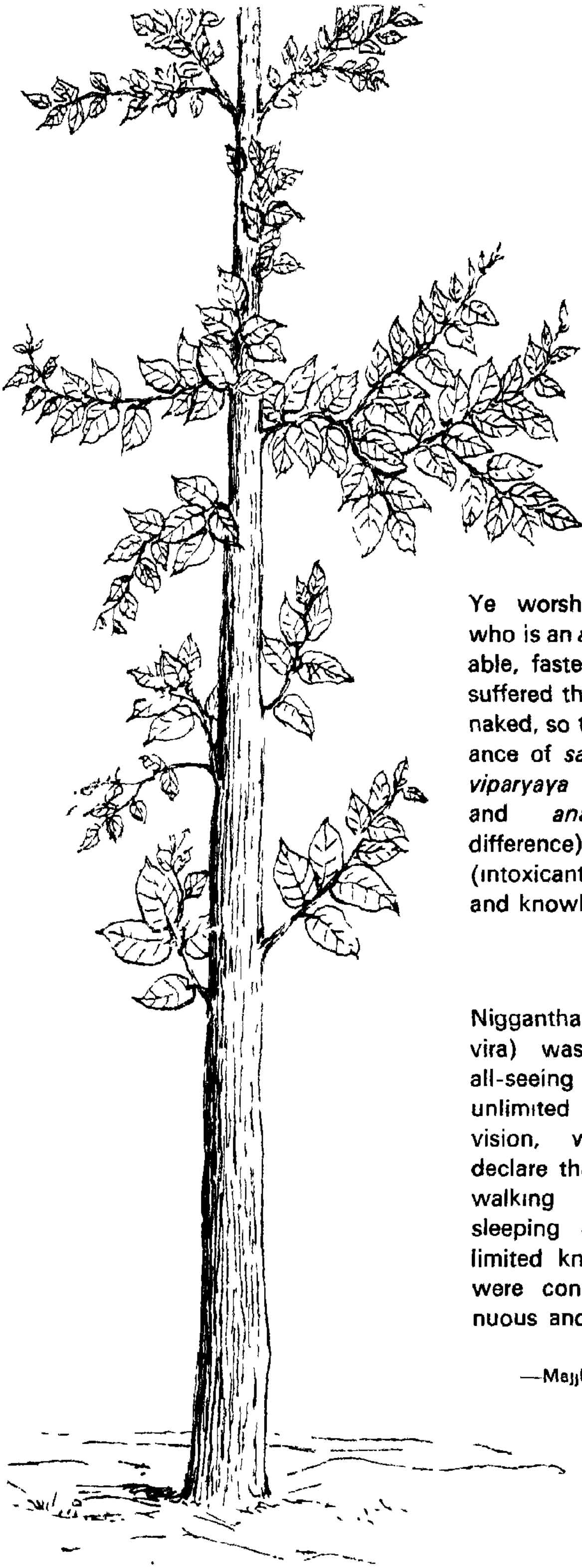
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Ye worship Lord Mahavira, who is an *atithi* (ascetic) adorable, fasted for months and suffered the hardship of being naked, so that the three ignorance of *samsaya* (scepticism) *viparyaya* (wrong knowledge) and *anadhyavasaya* (indifference), and the *madas* (intoxicants) of wealth, power and knowledge may not arise.

—*Yajurveda*, xix, 14

Niggantha Nataputta (Mahavira) was all-knowing and all-seeing and endowed with unlimited knowledge and vision, who alone could declare that, whether he was walking or standing still, sleeping or awake, the unlimited knowledge and vision were constantly his,—continuous and unperturbed.

—Majjhima Nikaya, I, pp 92-93



Acknowledgements

Bijoy Singh Nahar Plates 6, 19, 29
Ganesh Lalwani Plates 7, 20
Mahendra Kumar Singhi Frontispiece, Plates 16, 17, 18, 24
S Gopala Krishna Murthy Plate 22
American Academy of Benaras Plate 9
Ceylon Tourist Board, Government of Sri Lanka Plate 5B
Director General of Archaeology in India Plates 2A, 23, 31
Directorate of Archaeology West Bengal Plate 30
State Archaeological Gallery, West Bengal Plate 21
Ajmer Museum Plate 8A
Baroda Museum Plates 10, 11
British Museum Plate 13
Gwalior Museum Plate 5A
Lucknow Museum Plates 1, 4B, 4C, 8B, 14, 28A 28B
Mathura Museum Plates 26, 27
Nagpur Museum Plate 32
Patna Museum Plates 2B, 12

Besides the Museums and other sources mentioned above, the volume of materials integrated in this publication belongs to various learned publications and reports for which the Editor remains obliged and grateful

Cover . *Head of a Tirthankara, Kankali Tila, Mathura, 2nd Century A D*



Mahavira, Kundalpur, Nalanda, Mediaeval



MAHAVIRA

AN EPIC OF SERENITY IN SCULPTURE

P. C. Dasgupta

Director of Archaeology, West Bengal

The history of Vardhamana Mahavira is a legend of eternity and the emancipation of soul on the way of Time. Through centuries of yore the saga has conveyed truths in respect of immortality beyond space and the elements reflecting as it were the glory of *Jina* embodying the final serenity, transcendental and beyond the bondage of illusion. Thus, the life of the *Nirgrantha* is not only an inspiration for renunciation to establish a concord with the ideals of *Nirvana* but also a tale of highest bliss which has evoked alike a calm grandeur in art from early times. While his images often resemble the other *Tirthankaras* in their silent sublimity and discipline, their inner understanding again consoles the faithful in their yearning for knowledge following the wheel of redemption. in fact, the accounts of his birth as the son of Siddhartha and Trisala after his removal from the womb of Brahmani Devananda and the experience of auspicious dreams by the bearers of the child are of a remarkable significance not only for enu-

I am indebted to Sri Bhabatosh Majumdar & Sri Ranjit Sen of the Directorate of Archaeology, West Bengal, in connection with the preparation of the manuscript of this article.

merating an iconography of symbols but also for defining an allegory of mystic value or of the unknowable which can only be understood through the perception of *Pudgala-Sunyata*. A triumph of the ideal of Mahavira is beautifully revealed by a symbolic contrast which exists between his image in *Kayotsarga* pose where the knowledge of *Kevala* is manifest and his representation as *Jivantasvami* wearing the celestial crown. Besides the sculptures of the last *Tirthankara* visualised in his usual form of the *Kayotsarga*, the tradition of *Jivantasvami* conveys the feelings of a divine majesty. The latter has been envisaged not only by literature but also by two early bronzes from Akota close to Baroda in Western India. Apart from the exquisite taste and refinement shown by these two examples and other bronzes from Akota, in a way the story of *Jivantasvami* may be regarded as the legend of an intimate devotion and a lost masterpiece. This legend has been discussed by U. P. Shah on the basis of such works as the *Avasyaka-Curni*, the *Nisitha-Curni*, the *Vasudeva-Hindi* and the writings of Hemacandracarya.[1] As it appears, in the idyllic environment of empires, kingdoms and republics especially synchronising the ascendancy of Magadha Mahavira was so much honoured by his devotees that a sandalwood portrait of the *Tirthankara* carved before the renunciation fascinated King Pradyota of Ujjain. It is told that, "the statue came in possession of Udrayana of Sindhu-Sauvira from whom King Pradyota of Ujjain carried it off after depositing an exact wooden copy at Vitabhaya-Pattana. The copy was later on buried in a sand-storm which wrought the destruction of the whole city. Kumarapala got it excavated and brought it to Anahilavada-Patan . . . ."[2] According to U.P. Shah the original portrait of Mahavira consecrated at Vidisa by Pradyota actually brought about the tradition of *Jivantasvami* which represents Vardhamana Mahavira in meditation still wearing his princely crown and ornaments. This he thinks, has been revealed by the Akota bronzes. What Grunwedel observed in respect of Indian art particularly concerning divinities bedecked with ornaments will acquire a new significance regarding the symbolic appeal of the image of Vardhamana as the meditating prince. Even now he was neither a Marcus Aurelius nor a repentent Asoka illuminating the

[1] *Studies in Jaina Art*, Banaras, 1955, pp. 4-5.
[2] *Ibid.*

elegance of an empire but an embodiment of knowledge itself concomitant of the way of the *Nirgrantha.* In this connection it may also be noted that aside a miniature within a MS of the *Sthananga-Sutra*, an illustrated folio of the *Kalpa-Sutra* manuscript also depicts him in the centre of a *Samavasarana* being bedecked with ornaments.[3] As it is elsewhere in Brahmanical and Buddhist iconography the ideal is entirely symbolical. Here the bejewelled prince is the king of renunciation and the knowledge of all existence.

Since the *Nirgranthas,* like the followers of the Buddha, more relied on symbols for worship in early times, it is fascinating to observe various motifs occurring in the imperial art of the Mauryan age and in the carvings of later epochs. In the perspective of the faith of the Mauryan emperors towards the worshippers of the *Devas* as also towards the Buddhists, the *Nirgranthas* and the *Ajivikas* the importance of the pillar-capitals ascribed to *Priyadarsi* Asoka may acquire a new dimension. Since a number of pillars might have been installed before the reign of Asoka and the devotion of Candragupta Maurya and his great grand-son Samprati for the religion of the *Nirgrantha* is well-known, the veneration of the lion and the bull appearing on columns may be regarded with due considerations.

Here it may be noted that the famous *Ayagapatas* of Bhadranandi, Lonasobhika and Sihanadika from Mathura visualise Jaina *Stupas* flanked by free-standing columns with the usual bell-shaped capitals, the abacus, and animals. At instances the Wheel or the *Dharmacakra* is observed as being perched on the top. If compared in details the lion-capitals of Asokan monoliths may equally be resplendent of the essence of the life and teachings of Sakyamuni as their being at the same time the eternal emblem of Mahavira. In fact, the *Cakra-Dhvaja,* the *Hasti-Dhvaja* and the *Simha-Dhvaja* are well-known motifs of Jaina *Ayagapatas.*[4] As regards the tradition of raising free-standing columns or *Dhvaja-Stambhas* it may

[3] *Studies in Jaina Art*, p. 94.
Jain Journal, edited by Ganesh Lalwani, Vol. IV No. 4 (April 1970), p. 243, Fig. 16.

[4] Dr. V. S. Agrawal : 'Jaina Art of Mathura', *Babu Chotelal Jain Smrti Granth*, Calcutta, 1967.
For pillars shown in *Ayagapatas* see U. P. Shah : *Studies in Jaina Art*, figs. 7, 10, 12, 13 & 14B.

be recalled that the Rupnath Rock Edict of Asoka contains a clause which has a reference to such a custom. Apart from the erection of the Vedic *Sthuna* or the traditional *Yupa-Stambhas*, such pillars may also be described as the *Sasana-Stambhas* or *Sila-Stambhas* as respectively referred to in the Motupalli Pillar Inscription of Ganapati-Deva and in the Edicts of Asoka.[5] In the context of tradition the lion-capitals have indeed an appeal which is ever spontaneous in Indian art and its ethical repertoire. In connection with the Mauryan pillar capitals it may be seen that they consist of the lion, the bull and the elephant, the animals which also belonged to the dream of Brahmani Devananda when Mahavira was conceived.

Within the panorama of Jaina sculptures carved in Sunga-Kusana style there are references of Mahavira and his life which have mingled up in an art organised only to convey as if the realisation of eternity and the glory of *Nirvana*. Thus, the plastic art of the period not only has envisaged at one instance Nemesa in connection with Mahavira's birth but has also visualised a ballerina performing a dance within a pavilion before an audience which has been interpreted by V. S. Agrawal as a scene of celebration of the birth of Mahavira.[6] The latter as depicted in a sculpture preserved in the Museum at Lucknow has been, on the other hand, differently explained by U. P. Shah who likes to describe the standing figures as *Lokantika* gods witnessing the dance of Nilanjana before King Rsabha. A stone slab visualising the goat-headed Nemesa or Naigamesa is also preserved in the State Museum at Lucknow.[7] Dr. Buhler who has identified the composition has recounted the Jaina legend of Mahavira's birth after the transfer of the embryo by Naigamesa from the womb of Brahmani Devananda at Kundagrama to that of Trisala, wife of Siddhartha, following the desire of Indra.[8] It is known that Trisala was also bearing a daughter at the time who was similarly replaced in the womb of Devananda. The purpose of Indra, it is said, was to see the *Arhat* to be born in

5 Dr. J. N. Banerjea : *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, University of Calcutta, 1957.

6 V. S. Agrawal : 'The Nativity Scene of a Jaina Relief from Mathura', *Jaina Antiquary*, Vol. X (1944), pp. 1-5.
U. P. Shah : *Studies in Jaina Art*, p. 11.

7 R. C. Sharma : 'The Early Phase of Jaina Iconography', *Babu Chotelal Jain Smrti Granth*.

8 'Specimens of Jaina Sculptures from Mathura', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. II.

the family of a *Ksatriya* in stead of in the line of Brahmanas. The stone slab in the Lucknow Museum bears the label "*Bhagavate Nemeso*". On considerations of style the Naigamesa relief may be dated in *circa* 2nd century A.D. though a date as early as the early part of the 1st century A.D. has been proposed on grounds of palaeography of the inscription. Regarded alike by the Brahmanical and Jaina mythology as a "Guardian Deity of Children" the appearance of Naigamesa in the narrative slab heralds the birth of the all-knowing as the spiritual redeemer even adored by Indra in the ethereal world. No wonder the *Lokantika* gods will pray to him when a dance is staged for a celebration and for conveying honour to the supreme redemption now promised !

Though relegated to oblivion, there are still certain images of Mahavira which will bear witness to an ancient faith converging around the inner majesty of the *Tirthankara*. Thus, Dr. V. S. Agrawal has drawn our attention to the images of Mahavira discovered at Mathura either as individual sculptures or as belonging to the *Sarvatobhadra* convention.[9] Among these may be mentioned an image of Mahavira. An inscription on the pedestal refers to the year 34 of the Kusana era and describes the image as *Vardhamana-Pratima*. Dr. Agrawal noticed another sculpture of Mahavira in Mathura Museum which appears to be a masterpiece carved in Gupta tradition. Here "Mahavira is seated in *Utthita-Padmasana* having a lotus halo behind the head and hair arranged in short schematic curls in which austere stiffness has given place to subtle grace and a divine effulgence on the face."[10] Dr. Agrawal has further pointed out that, "the Jaina community of Mathura was interested in particular kind of *Vyuha* worship as shown by a number of conjoint fourfold images, *Pratima-Sarvatobhadrika*, the four pontiffs selected for this purpose being Rsabhanatha the first, Suparsva the seventh with a canopy of seven hoods, Parsvanatha the twentythird and Mahavira the twenty-fourth."[11]

The idyllic annals of Mahavira perhaps also inspired to an extent the early Jaina art of Orissa. As it will be seen, a

[9] 'Jaina Art of Mathura', *Babu Chotelal Jain Smrti Granth*.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 91.

tympanum of Cave 3 (*Ananta-Gumpha*) of Khandagiri near Bhuvaneswar is composed of the motif of the lustration of Sri or Laksmi also well-known in Brahmanical and Buddhist art alike.[12] This auspicious scene heraldic of fecundity and purity belongs to the repertoire of fourteen dreams seen by Trisala when Naigamesa brought to her womb the embryo of Mahavira. The appearance of pilasters with lion-capital at the entrance of the neighbouring rock-cut cells of Udaygiri may have a relevant significance in this connection. There is already an opinion that Mahavira visited the Kumari Hill (Khandagiri-Udaygiri) of Kalinga for preaching his religion and the lion-sculptures of the caves bear witness to the sacred memory of the twentyfourth *Tirthankara*.[13] In the context of Mahavira's visit also to Tosali in Kalinga and his preachings therein as referred to by the *Avasyaka-Sutra*, K. S. Behera of Utkal University has drawn our attention to certain Jaina Texts according tc which Tosali "attracted many Jaina preachers and had a Jaina image guarded by the King Tosalika."[14]

That the religion of the *Nirgrantha* had a firm foot-hold in Kalinga is best illustrated by the archaeological wealth of the country aside being often revealed by literary accounts. The eminence of Kharavela achieving as it were the status of an emperor who could challenge the ascendancy of Magadha in the first century B. C. appears to be as important in the history of propagation of Jaina faith in a national mould as the age of Samprati, the grandson of Asoka. It is known from his famous *Hathi-Gumpha* inscription that in spite of his military genius he had his best devotion for the faith of the *Nirgrantha*. As a 'Crusader' he led his columns and brought back the statue of *Kalinga-Jina* from Magadha. Historians will decide how far he epitomised the national feelings of Kalinga after various aggressions including the devastating conquest by Asoka in the 3rd century B. C. Since the image is known to have been taken away by a *Nandaraja* many years before Kharavela it has not yet been finally established who was actually the king responsible for it. Though it is generally asserted by a reading of the relevant line of the

[12] Debala Mitra : *Udayagiri & Khandagiri*, New Delhi, 1960, pp. 48-49, pl. XIV A.

[13] K. S. Behera : 'A Note on Jainism in Orissa', *Babu Chotelal Jain Smrti Granth*, p. 166.

[14] *Ibid.*

inscription that the event took place three hundred years before the 13th regnal year of the Ceti or Cedi (*Mahameghavahana*) monarch of Kalinga, the likelihood that the statement connotes one hundred and three years cannot be also ruled out. Generally, it has been agreed that the *Nandaraja* was identical with the *Sarva-Ksatrantaka* Mahapadma Nanda and Kharavela ruled in 1st century B.C. It is, however, difficult to accept the view since the Asokan inscriptions have stated that Kalinga was not conquered before Asoka. As regards this statement Dr. H. C. Rai Chaudhuri has commented that, "such claims are on a par with the Gupta boast that Samudra Gupta was *Ajita-Rajajeta,* conqueror of unconquered kings, and that *Asvamedha* sacrifice had been revived, after a long period of abeyance, by him".[15] But this opinion may not hold good in view of the almost universal agreement that Asokan Edicts contain truthful statements in their essential meaning and purport. If Asoka actually conquered Kalinga which was independent and was defended by a powerful army before him as noted by Pliny, who seemingly relied on the *Indika* of Megasthenes, the entire subject deserves renewed considerations. In fact, the *Mudra-Raksasa* describes Candragupta Maurya, the grand-father of *Priyadarsi* Asoka, both as a *Mauryaputra* as also a *Nandanvaya* (Act IV). Dr. H. C. Rai Chaudhuri has brought to light several important sources in this connection. Thus, he informs "Ksemendra and Somadeva refer to him as *Purvananda-Suta.* The commentator on the *Visnu-Purana* (IV, 24-Wilson IX, 187) says that Candragupta was the son of Nanda by a wife named Mura, whence he and his descendants were called Mauryas. Dhundiraja, the commentator on the *Mudra-Raksasa*, informs us, on the other hand, that Candragupta was the eldest son of Maurya who was the son of the Nanda King Sarvarthasiddhi by Mura, daughter of a *Vrsala* (Sudra?)".[16] Under the present circumstances is it possible that the *Nandaraja* who took away the statue of the *Kalinga-Jina* was indirectly a king of Nanda lineage following certain traditions ? The devastating war waged against Kalinga by Asoka should have an important bearing in respect of the statement of the *Hathi-Gumpha* inscription. As regards the ancestry of Candragupta, Dr. H. C. Rai Chaudhuri has summed up that "Hindu

[15] *Political History of Ancient India.* 4th Edition, p. 314.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 216, foot-note.

literary tradition connects him with the Nanda dynasty of Magadha."[17] Mario Bussagli has pointed out that in the *Parisista-Parvan*, the Jaina work of Hemacandra, it has been told that, "the mother of Candragupta was the daughter of the head of the custodians who looked after the peacocks of Nanda (*Mayura-Posaka*)."[18] According to Bussagli the ancestry of Candragupta is still uncertain. After considering various sources he opines : "To make it clear I think it likely that these data on the formation of the Maurya may be traced back to the time when these semi-legendary accounts were taking shape in India which repeated again and again, reappear in the later Jaina tradition. This would explain the mingling of historical facts with others that are purely legendary. The court of Bindusara must have offered a favourable environment in which the figure of Candragupta, without losing all its historical features, began to grow dim behind the veil of legends whose purpose was to give a noble origin to the Mauryas, but that could not entirely obscure the truth of events which were still too recent."[19] Bussagli has also drawn attention to the opinion of Adrzej Gawronski according to which the use of *Vrsala* in the *Mudra-Raksasa* "reflects the atmosphere of the courts and the authoritative and confidential behaviour of the Minister to the King."[20] Without actually supporting the identification Bussagli has compared *Vrsala* with the Greek regal title *Basileus*.[21] Though interesting, the expression *Nava-Nanda* found in the works of Ksemendra and Somadeva may only signify 'nine Nandas' as opposed to 'a new branch of the Nandas' which belongs to the interpretation of some scholars.

While the reference of a *Nandaraja* in the *Hathi-Gumpha* inscription of Kharavela will recall the imperial ambition of Magadha, the *Kalinga-Jina* carried away by the invader might be any one of the *Tirthankaras* among whom the names of Rsabhanatha, Parsvanatha and Mahavira have come within the range of greater probability. The images of *Jinas* were evidently represented in sculpture in the Maurya-Sunga

[17] *Political History of Ancient India*, p. 216.

[18] 'Indian Events in Trogus Pompeius', *East and West*, Published year VII, Number 3, October 1956, p. 233.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

[21] *Ibid.*

period following as it appears the tradition of the meditating *Arhat* or of an age-old icon which commended the physical attitude of the *Kayotsarga.* The polished torso of a *Tirthankara* from Lohanipur in Bihar represents the sublimity of a *Jina* which has traversed the bonds of illusion. The soft volume under a changeless discipline will transmit the ideal of eternal liberation as against the impermanence of mortal experience and fleeting passions. The image which reveals certain traits of Mauryan art was evidently worshipped in Magadha after being enshrined in a temple. Such a sculpture can only recall the tradition of representing a *Jina* as early as the days of Kharavela and in the epoch preceding them. In this respect an opinion of Hiuen-Tsang lacks real understanding though it has a force in highlighting a resemblance. As regards the followers of the religion of the *Nirgrantha* he opined : "The figure of their great Master they stealthily class with that of *Tathagata* ; it differs only on the point of clothing ; the points of beauty are absolutely the same."[22] In fact, the formality and inspiration of Jaina art had a foundation extending as it appears to an unknown antiquity before the commencement of the Christian era. If the historical tradition of *Kayotsarga* establishes a standard and a mode the epic of sculptures representing the pose involved may have its beginning as early as in the art of Harappa. Apart from the evidence of the Harappan nude torso suggesting the sublimity of the *Kayotsarga* pose the legends of the sandal-wood image of *Jivantasvami* which was carried away by Pradyota of Ujjain when judged in the light of the sculpture from Lohanipur will illustrate a symbolic and unwavering faith through the passage of time. Though we are yet to observe a Buddha carved as a divine image before the dawn of the Kusana age the ideals of the *Nirgrantha* were already rooted in Indian art. The *Hathi-Gumpha* inscription of Kharavela bears evidence to such an ancient tradition. The reference to the carrying away of the statue of *Kalinga-Jina* echoes the ardour of Udrayana, Pradyota and Kumarapala for *Jivantasvami* as contained in Jaina annals. Spreading as far south as the island of Sri Lanka, the religion of the *Nirgrantha* even established itself at Anuradhapura under King Pandukabhaya in the fourth century B.C.[23] A Jaina hermitage is also

[22] Watters, T. : *On Ywan Chwang's Travels in India.*

[23] *Ceylon : Ancient Cities* (published by Ceylon Tourist Board).

referred to in connection with the chequered life of Vattagamani Abhaya (2nd-Ist century B.C.).[24] One may obviously expect important relics of Jainism in the archaeology of Sri Lanka. The monument of Sigiriya, the partly lion-shaped rock associated with the parricide King Kassapa (473-491 A.D.) has obviously a history of its own. As V. W. Archer states : "The name Sigiriya allows various derivations. The most popular translates *Giri* as 'throat', an etymology lent colour by the partial restoration of the fantastic ruin (on the terrace half-way to summit) of a lion through whose throat—literally—the way to the summit passes. Others render *Giri* by 'mountain'. There is no quarrel over *Sinha* : 'lion'. The name Lion Mountain could well be older than Kassapa's time and there is no doubt the Rock was known before him. (A few sites incorporated in Kassapa's city were, in fact, already venerable when it was built. An inscription on the so-called Rock of the Cobra's Hood is in pre-Christian script) Certainly, Sigiriya does resemble some great tawny beast *Couchant.*"[25] Archer has also recalled a suggestion of the Ceylonese Palaeontologist Deraniyagala : "It is possible that the extinct lion of Ceylon, *Leo Leo Sinhaleus,* persisted into historical times and that it once inhabited the area."[26]

While the massive figuration of a lion at Sigiriya must have a history of its own which has sunk in oblivion it may be tempting to search for an iconography in the heraldic concept involved. This may be felt especially in the perspective of the stylistic resemblance and link between the Jaina paintings of *Arivar-Kovil* (i.e., 'the temple of the *Arhat*') at Sittannavasal in Tamilnad and the frescoes of Sigiriya.[27] Any association of the lion of Sigiriya with Mahavira does not seem to be beyond the range of possibility. It is known that Jaina preachers disembarked at Ceylon mainly migrating from South India even before the age of Bhadrabahu and Visakhacarya the reminiscences of whose religious activity in the Peninsula have now relegated to legends. The *Gana* of Bhadrabahu stirred up such a movement in the South especially under Kondakundacarya in the first century A.D. that the art and institutions involved must have transmitted

[24] *Ceylon : Ancient Cities.*

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] *Jain Journal,* Vol. III No. 4 (April 1969), pp. 252-53.

ideals and thoughts of the *Nirgrantha* to distant lands. It will be noticed that the *Gana* of Bhadrabahu was also known as *Sarasvati-Gaccha* in memory of a miracle associated with scholiast Kondakundacarya who is known to have been graced by the divine utterances of a stone Sarasvati. In such a context the spread of Jainism in the South will not only indicate peity and an inspiration for the iconography of the *Jinas* and their accessory deities and symbols but it will also vouch for an intellect and realisation of outstanding order. Without endeavouring to adjust with changing situations resulting out of confrontation of thought and influence of new groups and nationalities from the north the maxims of the *Nirgrantha* better prepared to be relegated in contemplations and repose than to compromise. The emancipation of soul in the doubtful world of atoms remained as the purest light before the ethereal assemblage of nude sylphs as represented at Sittannavasal whose soft lines and full breasts vivid with eternal life will recall the heavenly beauties of Sigiriya. The latter are admiring a collection of chosen flowers which they sometimes seem to sprinkle with delicate hands as if to celebrate a great event in the mortal world. Comparing the *Apsaras* of Sigiriya with the sculpted female figures of Amaravati Benjamin Rowland has again suggested a link whose exact religious significance is yet to be ascertained.[28]

The ideals attached with Mahavira enlightened the thoughts of devotees both in the north and in the south. While the glowing tribute to Vardhamana inscribed at Sravana-Belgola will reveal an understanding of the greatness of the *Tirthankara* about two thousand years ago, the noble monuments at Tirupuruttikunram (Jina-Kanci) near Conjeevaram and on a series of hill-spurs including the famous Sittanavasal, the Narttamalai and the Aluruttimalai in Tamilnad are ancient witnesses of the history of the *Nirgrantha*. Mahavira worshipped at Tirupuruttikunram is known as Trailokyanathasvami representing an inheritance from the distant past. Besides monuments and relics awaiting evaluation there are such sculptures of Mahavira in the South which are sublime witnesses of an everlasting glory. Among these may be mentioned the image of the *Tirthankara* (Vardhamana) from Biccavol in East Godavary region of Andhra Pradesh and other

[28] Benjamin Rowland : *The Art and Architecture of India.*

sculptures, one carved in the cave of Kallil and the others found at Alatur both in Kerala. The image from Biccavol once being worshipped in a Jaina temple built by Sila, the daughter of Karaka, the regent of the Rastrakuta emperor Amoghavarsa, is an important example mainly due to an attempt to delineate well-defined features reaching the verge of a portraiture leaving away the highly conventional style of the torso.[29] As it appears, the sculptures of Vardhamana from Biccavol has a more likeness with some of the Ceylonese masterpieces involving the ideal of form than with the general repertoire of sculptures of various regions of India covering prolonged epochs through centuries. As regards the sculptures of Mahavira from Kallil and Alatur the following excerpts from an article of N. G. Unnithan will convey important details : "Kallil is the most important ancient site of Jainism in Kerala. Kallil contains a natural rock-cave in which are set the figures of Mahavira, Parsvanatha and Padmavati Devi. On the facade of the cave on the overhanging rock there is the figure of Mahavira which is incomplete. People believe that heavenly sculptors come down every day to complete it. The image of Mahavira, carved in half relief on the back wall of the cave, is seated on a *Simhasana* in the *Yogic* posture. The usual totem lion is carved on the middle of the seat with triple umbrella above the head and *Gandharvas* on either side with *Cauris.* On the right is shown Padmavati Devi, the principal deity in the temple to-day. To the left of Mahavira is Parsvanatha."[30] N. G. Unnithan has noticed important Jaina relics at Alatur in Kavasseri Amsom in Palghat district of Kerala. These are represented by "a ruined Jain temple, with sculptures and inscriptions scattered."[31] Some of the observations made by the scholar in respect of the ruins of Alatur have been given below :

"The site of the ruined temple is popularly known a 'Cakkayar-Tottam' or 'Kundam'—a colloquial derivation probably from 'Sakya-Garden'. In olden days there was little distinction between the Jain and Buddhist sects, as the term *'Palli'* was applied to all non-Hindu temples. The ruined temple under

[29] *Jain Journal,* Vol. III No. 4 (April 1969), p. 241 and the plate.

[30] 'Relics of Jainism—Alatur', *Journal of Indian History* (published by the University of Kerala, Trivandrum), Vol. XLIV, Part II, Serial No. 131 (August 1966), pp. 538-39.

[31] *Ibid.,* p. 537.

reference is on a hillock, just half a furlong away from the 'Cakkayar-Kundam', which is known even today as *'Palli-Kunnu'*. The ruined parts of a temple, like beams, slabs, pillars etc. are found scattered in the area. Around the temple are verdant paddy fields. No details are available about the character of the temple or the main deity as the whole edifice has been destroyed, two sculptures of Mahavira and Parsvanatha and an inscription in *Vatteluttu*, partly broken have been recovered in tact from the site of the ruined temple. Several beautiful but broken sculptures, believed to be those of Mahavira, were found strewn on the hillock and in the fields around."[32]

The discovery at Alatur has been regarded as "an important landmark in the history of Jainism in Kerala in view of its proximity to Kangudesa, which according to the present evidence included parts of Mysore, Coimbatore and Salem."[33] Aside a repertoire of early literary evidences including those contained in the accounts of Hiuen-Tsang, as also in the *Dharmamrta* of Nayasena, the *Brhat-Kathakosa* of Harisena and the *Manimekhalai*, there are indeed such ancient relics which may shed a new light upon the spread of Jainism in the far south in early times. Among various other instances it is appropriate to refer to the reign of Pallava King Mahendra-varman who was a Jaina until he became a Hindu under the influence of the famous saint Appar.[34] The covention of the Pallava architecture revealed by the well-known leonine caryatids of pillars at Mamallapuram may have a tradition of its own inspired by early ideals and ethical evaluations commended alike by Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina faiths.

A brief survey of Indian sculptures will effectually reveal how the accounts about Mahavira conveyed new elements of thought and ensured confidence in an age-old tradition of austerity and discipline aimed for final liberation of soul. Actually, the doctrine has been epitomised by *Jinas* or *Arhats* of this age and beyond. Herein perhaps lies the meaning of the *Sasvata-Jinas* referring to the mystic range outside the succession of the *Tirthankaras* from Rsabhanatha. There

[32] 'Relics of Jainism—Alatur', *Journal of Indian History*, pp. 537-38.

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 541.

[34] N. S. Ramaswamy : *Mamallapuram* (A Guide), published by the State Department of Archaeology, Government of Tamilnadu, 1969, p. 5.

are instances when the depiction of numerous *Jinas* seated, or standing in *Kayotsarga* pose will indicate eternity and the eternal quest. Obviously, the devotees sought in the sculptures of Vardhamana Mahavira a supreme ideal faithfully handed down from the unknown past. Here the sculptor's ideals were dedicated to the cause of a constant truth unchanged by revolutions of the society and even by perceptions and learnings of the mortal world which may not be in conformity with the *Kevala-Jnana* and the infinite majesty of the *Syadvada*. As it is felt, the disappearance of the religion and the philosophy of the *Nirgrantha* from the major parts of the sub-continent is not so much due to the assimilations of its traits by the Brahmanical orders as much due to the solemn indifference of the institution of the *Arhats* towards socio-cultural adjustments at the cost of the purest aim of attaining the supreme knowledge which liberates one from the bondage of the *Samsara*. Even in the absence of devotees and ritual performances in comparison with the earlier height the ideal has achieved immortality creating an unusual history in the world.

Without entering into the distinctions of the *Svetambara* and the *Digambara* thoughts one may be familiar with the bliss of the fragrant blossoms that are glowing within the shrine of Jaina philosophy. It is gratifying to note the sublimity of the *Jinas* translated in sculpture with an understanding that goes beyond the apotheosis of a hero or a heroic being. Apart from the crowned Mahavira in bronze from Akota in Western India which will recall the tradition of *Jivantasvami*, another bronze from the same site envisaging Rsabhanatha, the first *Tirthankara*, apparently in Gupta-Maitraka style, indicates a convention of representing the *Jina* as being donned with a *Dhoti*.[35] This aspect is obviously very important in the perspective of the Jaina traditions and iconography in general. A comparable bronze image of Rsabhanatha, though of later date, from Sirohi also shows a beautiful treatment of the *Dhoti* with its delicate striations.[36] U. P. Shah has recalled a standing stone image of Parsvanatha from Rohtak near Delhi which shows a correspondence of the style of *Dhoti* visualised.[37] In fact, a group of bronze images of the *Jina* standing

[35] *Studies in Jaina Art*, Plate VIII, Fig. 19.
[36] *Ibid.*, Plate XII, Fig. 30.
[37] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

in *Kayotsarga* from Valabhi represent this tradition replete with a familiar and an intimate devotion.[38] It is likely that the clothed *Tirthankaras* in the Jaina art indicate an age of transition when Jainism if it did not relinquish from any predilection for adaptation with social environments might have launched in propagating its doctrines in extraneous lands what had been accomplished by the Mahayana Buddhism unfolding a panorama of art often centering round the robed Buddha with the majesty of his eternal calmness and sublimity. The centuries will show that the ideals of the *Nirgrantha* in its main-stream remained as ever in its own austerity before a back-ground extending further in the past.

Under the perspective of *Jina* images from Akota, Sirohi, Valabhi, and Rohtak mention may be made of a unique sculptured panel from Mathura, now preserved in the Lucknow Museum.[39] The panel which was discovered at Kankali-Tila depicts a saintly figure identified by Fuhrer with Mahavira, in the attitude of preaching before a group of royal devotees as if getting to their meditation the message of eternity. The snail-shell curl of the *Jina* wearing a *Dhoti* and an airy scarf so familiar with the *Yaksas* and the *Devatas* of Indian art as it is so with the *Vidyadharas* of Central Asia and China will again highlight an ancient ideal glowing with the spiritual grace of *Bhakti.* It is even possible that here Mahavira is conversing with the gods donning the divine clothes presented by Indra before or after attaining his liberation at Grimbhikagrama. The question raised by Mrs. Lohuizen-de-Leeuw regarding the 'Jainistic character' of this panel from Kankali-Tila is less acceptable. Dr. B. N. Puri has made the following remark in this connection : "Since it was found at the site of the ancient Jaina *Stupa,* it would be really interesting if we agree with Fuhrer and find Vardhamana dressed in *Dhoti,* and in the attitude of protection."[40] The treatment of the scraf sliding down from shoulders in frills makes any identification with Buddha or Bodhisattva as envisaged in Kusana art less probable. The absence of the *Srivatsa* symbol may be regarded in the light of the development of iconographic conventions in the period concerned.

[38] *Studies in Jaina Art,* Plate XII, Fig. 29.

[39] B. N. Puri : *India Under the Kusanas,* Bombay, 1965, p. 202 and plate.

[40] *Ibid.,* p. 202.

be mentioned a beautiful and elegant bronze image discovered amidst the ruins of an ancient *Pidha-Deula* of laterite at Nunia close to Gidni in Jhargram sub-division of Midnapur district. Standing in *Kayotsarga* pose the *Jina* has his usual *Lanchana*, the lion. The lyrical grace of the figure visualised in spite of the firmness delineated will assign it to the stylistic idiom of eleventh century A.D. As it seems, the representation of Mahavira in sculpture reveals the glory of his realisation as much as the wider appreciation of the holy institution of the *Tirthankaras* bears credit to his spiritual grandeur. Defining a succession of *Arhats*, Vardhamana's greatness does not glow alone. His ideals have merged, as it has been already observed, into the eternal knowledge of the *Jinas*, the conquerors of the Self. His idyllic association with the lion and the *Sala* tree may be reminiscent of the ancient environments of eastern India aside their being of symbolic purport. On the basis of the discovery of a fossil at Susunia in Bankura district the palaeontologists have now agreed about the existence of lion in this part of India as early as the Pleistocene. Scholars will have to consider in future whether the throne of the *Tirthankaras* with two couchant lions has also an iconographic tradition emanating from an early symbolism relevantly associated with the legend of Mahavira, the historical founder of the religion of the *Nirgrantha*. Revealing as it were, the efficacy of *Dhyana*, the highest meditation, Mahavira's knowledge and perception have imparted a feeling of intimate yearning for liberation as also a sense of eternity and sublimity in Indian art along the landscape of past history often characterised by human enquiry in respect of the greatness of life.

PLATES

Sigiriya, Ceylon



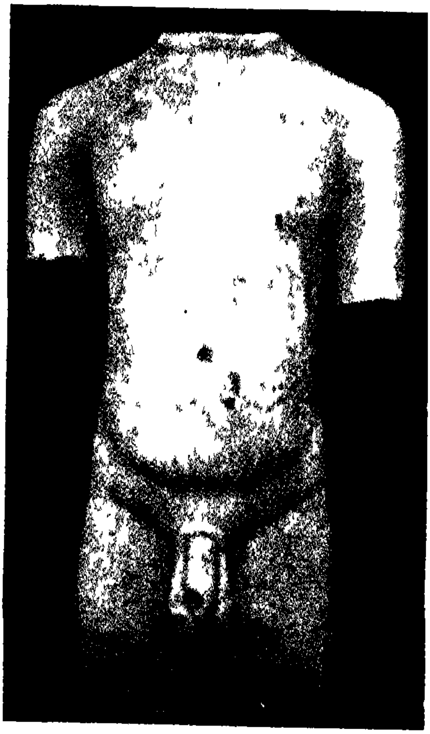
"Admiring a collection of chosen flowers which they sometimes seem to sprinkle with delicate hands as if to celebrate a great event. . ."



Ayagapata or Tablets of Worship set up by Sihanadika
Kankali Tila, Mathura
1st-2nd Century A D



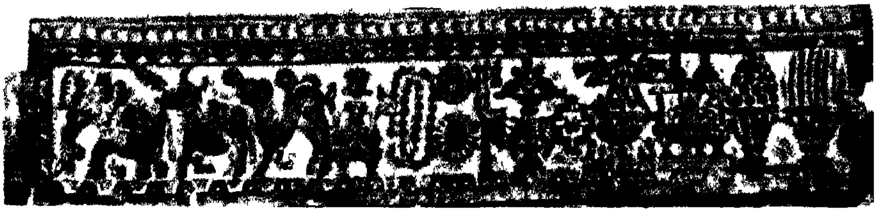
A Statuette, Harappa



B Tirthankara, Lohanipur, Bihar
C 3rd Century B C.



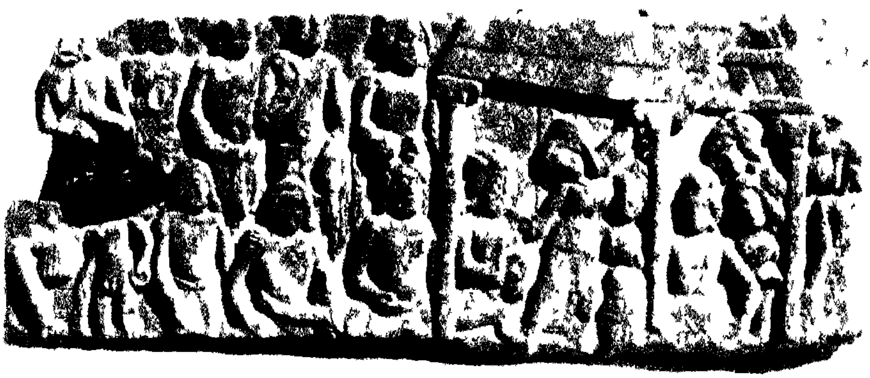
Mother of Jina, Deogarh Fort, Temple No. 4
C. 10th Century A.D.



A Fourteen Dreams, Wooden Panel, Patan
C 18th Century A D



B Transfer of Mahavira's Embryo, Mathura
C 1st Century A D



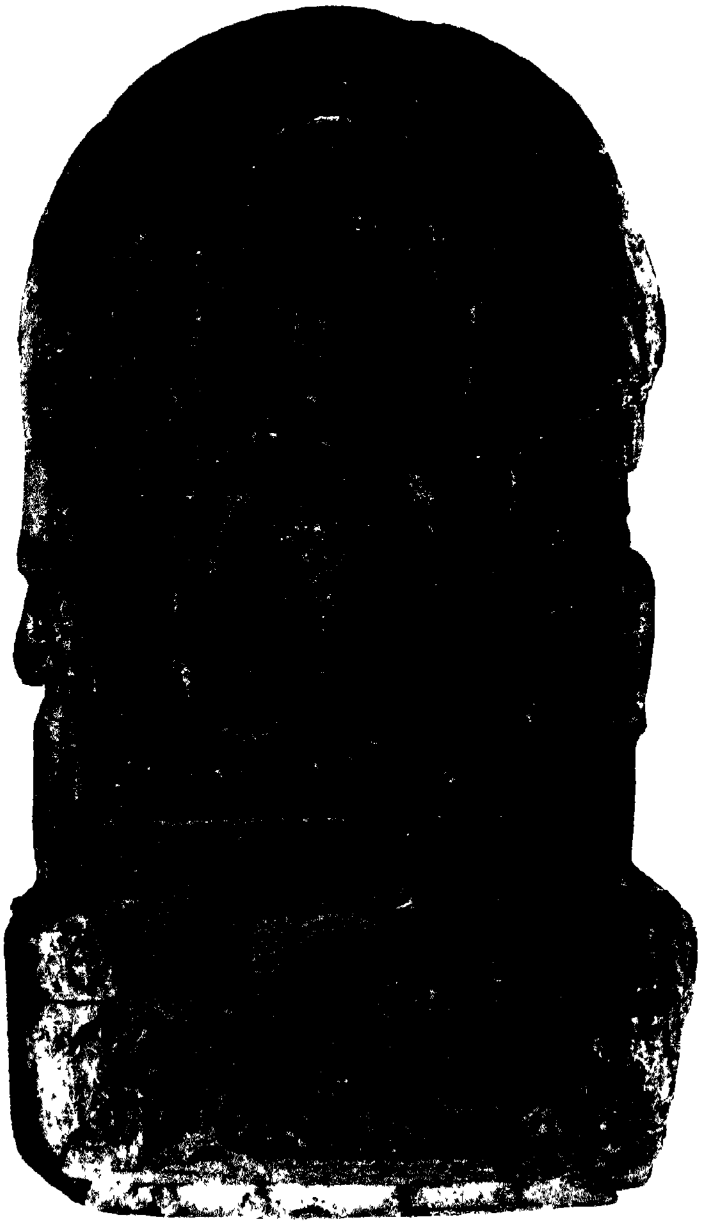
C Dance of Nilanjana, Mathura
C 1st Century B C



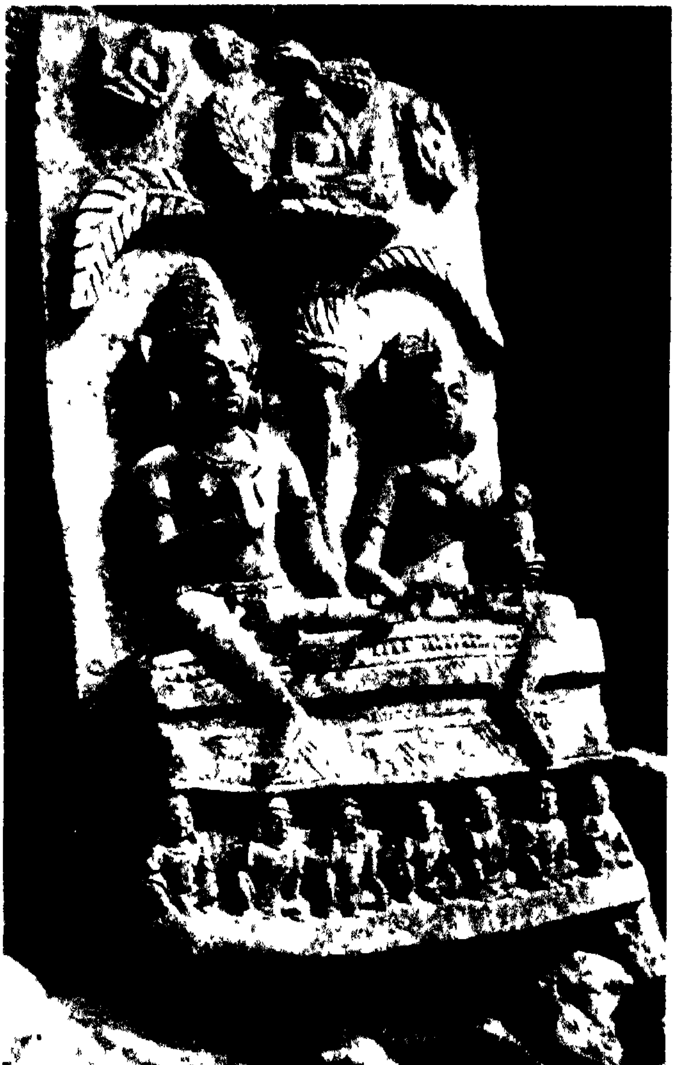
A Nativity of Mahavira, Pathari, Madhya Pradesh, Gupta-Vakataka



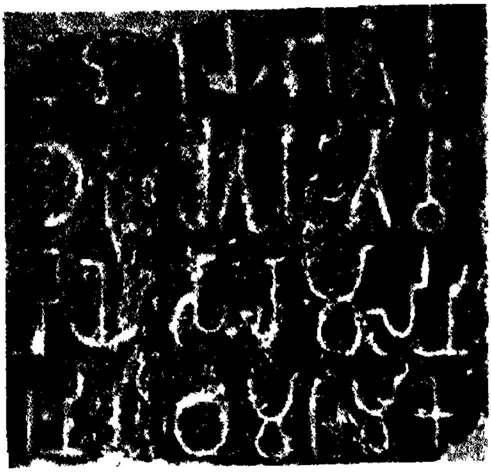
B Sigiriya Rock showing the Lion's paws at centre, Ceylon The earliest history of the monument seemingly dates back before the reign of the parricide king Kassapa in the 5th century A D.



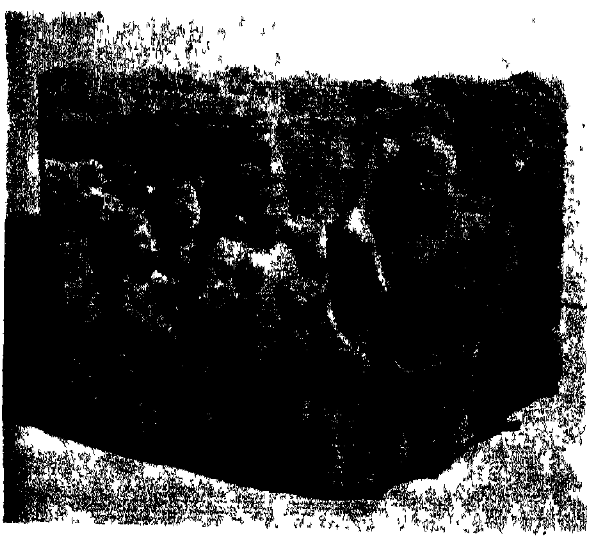
Sculpture seemingly envisaging Mahavira with Mother Trisala
Vaibharagiri, Rajagrha
C. 10th Century A.D.



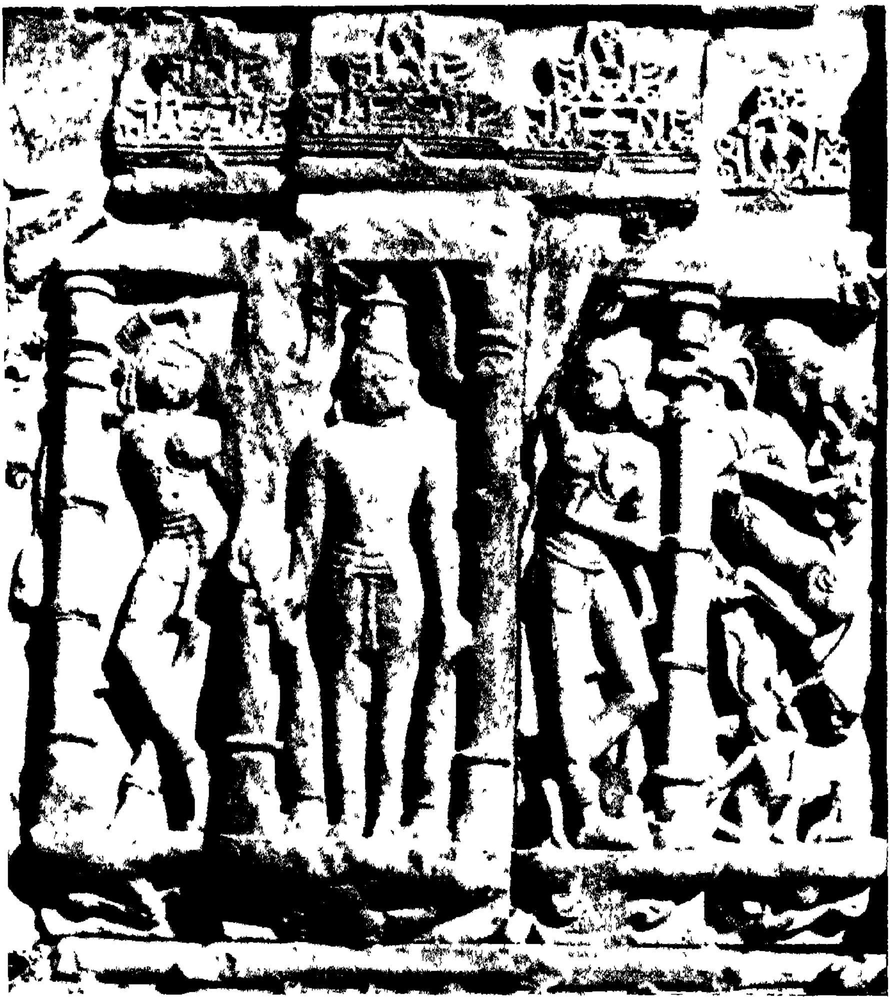
Parents of Jina, Pakbirra, Purulia
C 9th Century A D



A Vira Era referred to in an edict found at Barli near Ajmer and inscribed in Maurya-Sunga Brahmi This inscription has been dated in 84th year of Vira Nirvana and, thereby, its antiquity should go back as early as 443 B C



A. Vardhamana preaching to Royalty, Kankali Tila, Mathura C 1st Century A.D.



Jivantasvami
Mahavira Temple, Ahar, Rajasthan
Early Mediaeval



Jivantasvami, envisaged in Gupta style, Bronze, Akota Maitraka Period

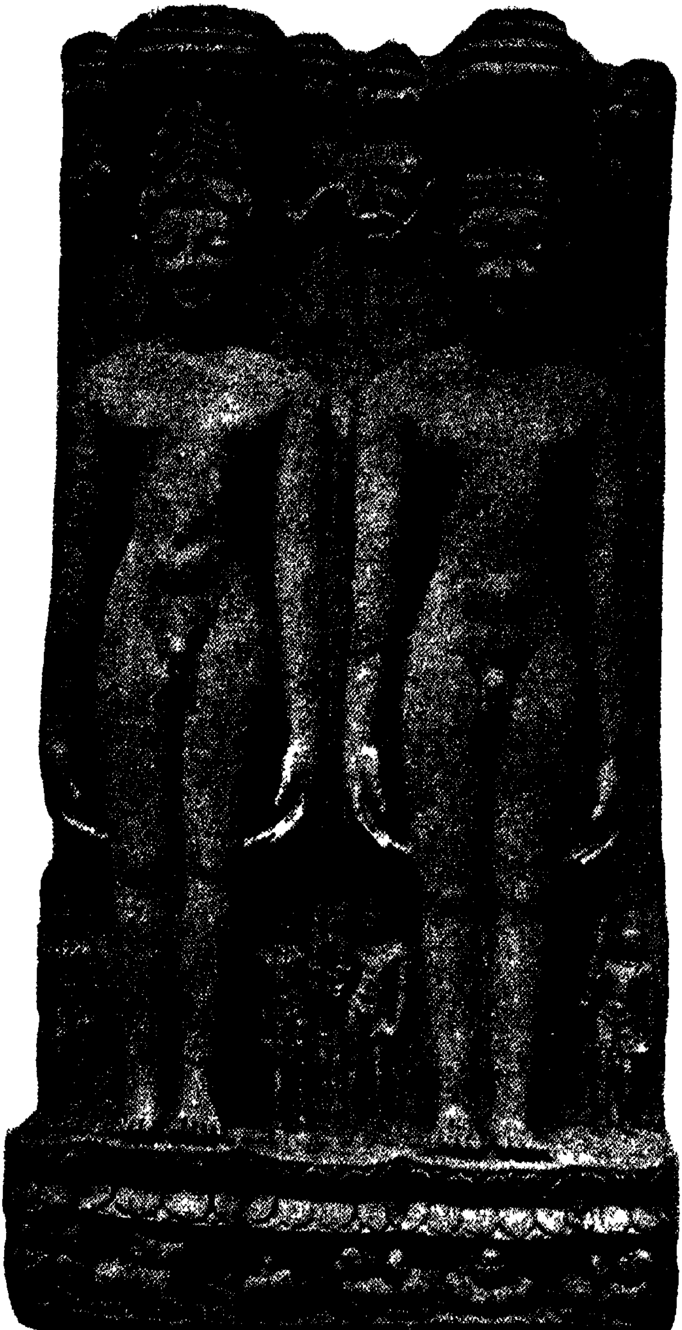


Jivantasvami, envisaged in Gupta style
Maitraka Period, Bronze, Akota



Rsabhanatha and Mahavira
Machuatand Aluara, Manbhum
Early Mediaeval

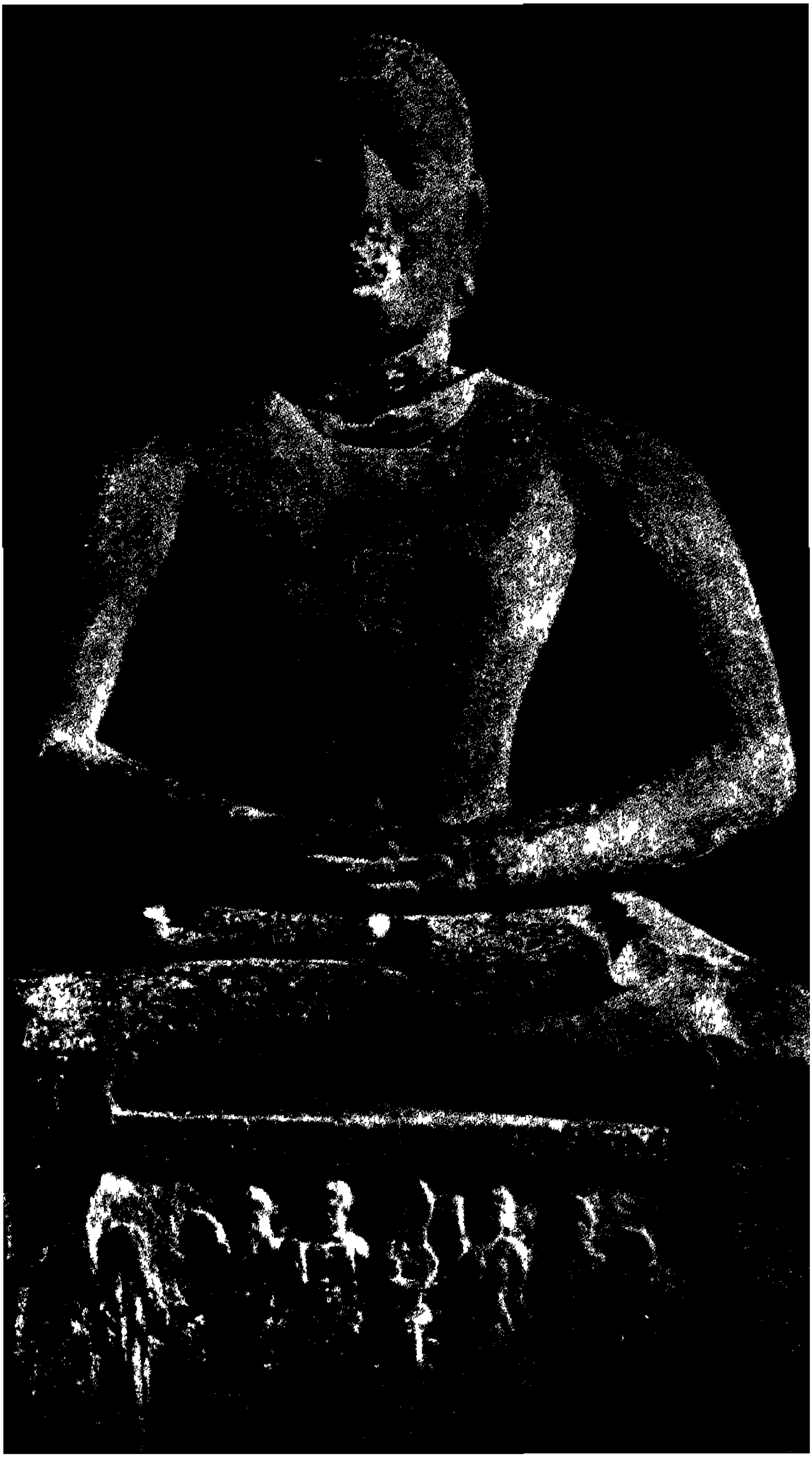
PLATE XIII



Rsabhanatha and Mahavira, probably from Orissa
Early Mediaeval

PLATE XIV

Mahavira, Mathura *C 2nd Century A D.*



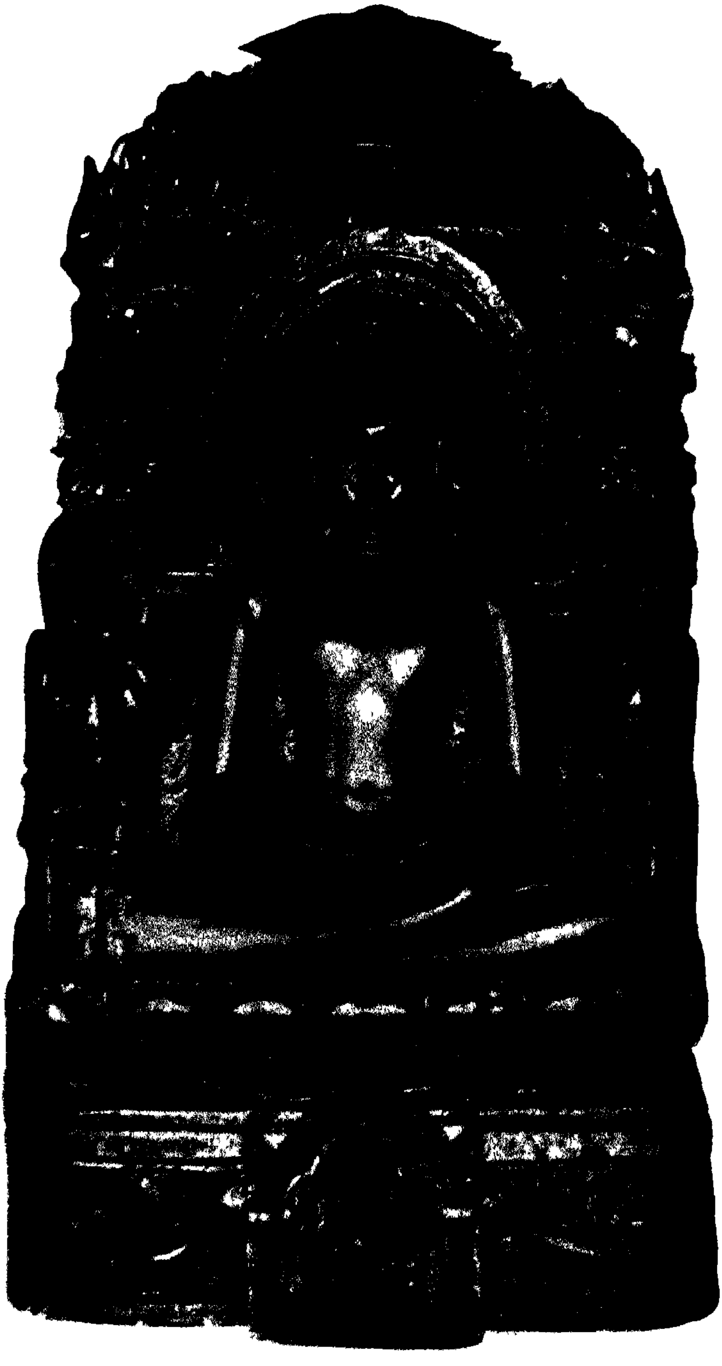




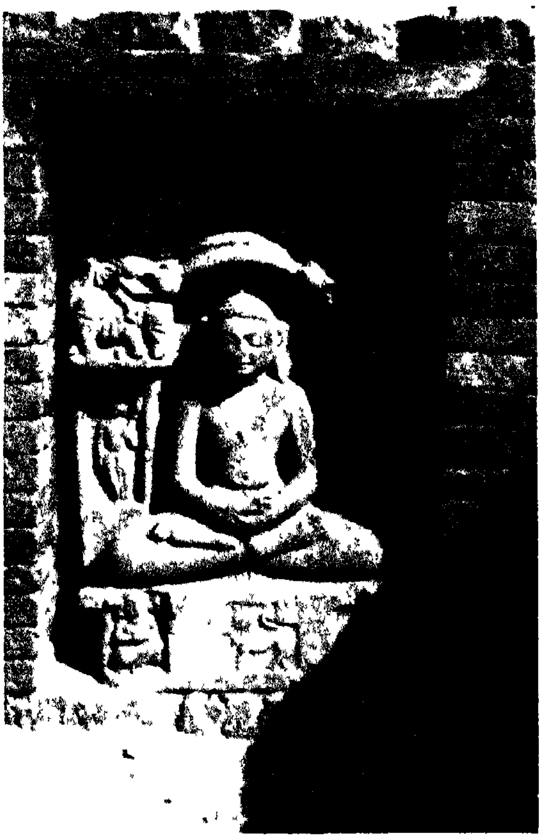
Mahavira, Ksatriyakunda, Lachwar
Mediaeval

Mahavira, Nandan, Pondicherry
C 10th Century A D

PLATE XV



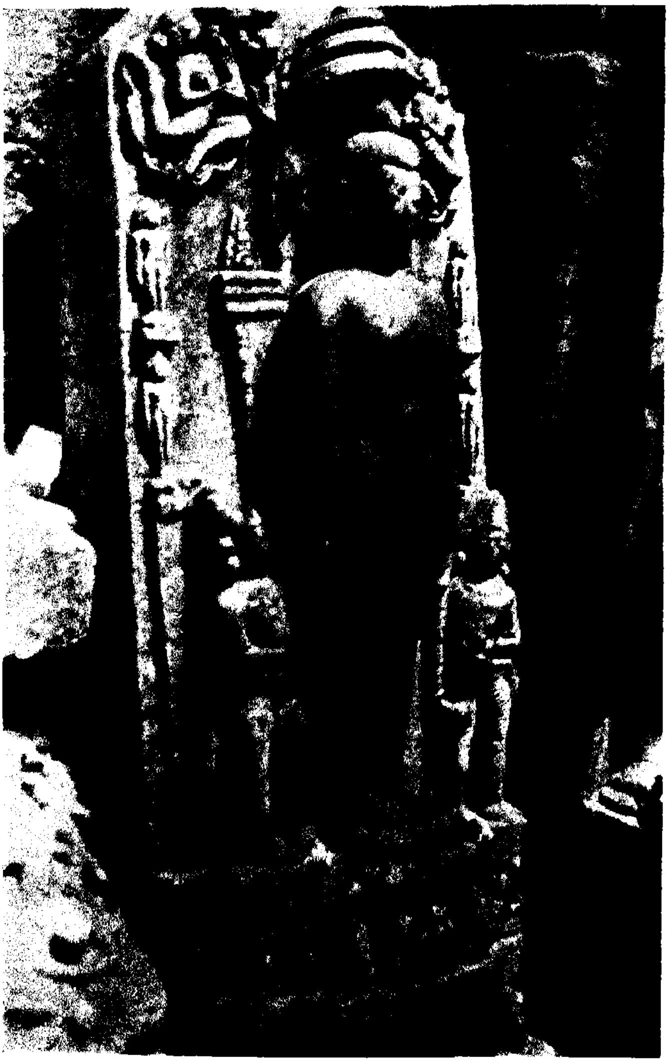
Mahavira, Ksatriyakundapura, Lachwar
Pala



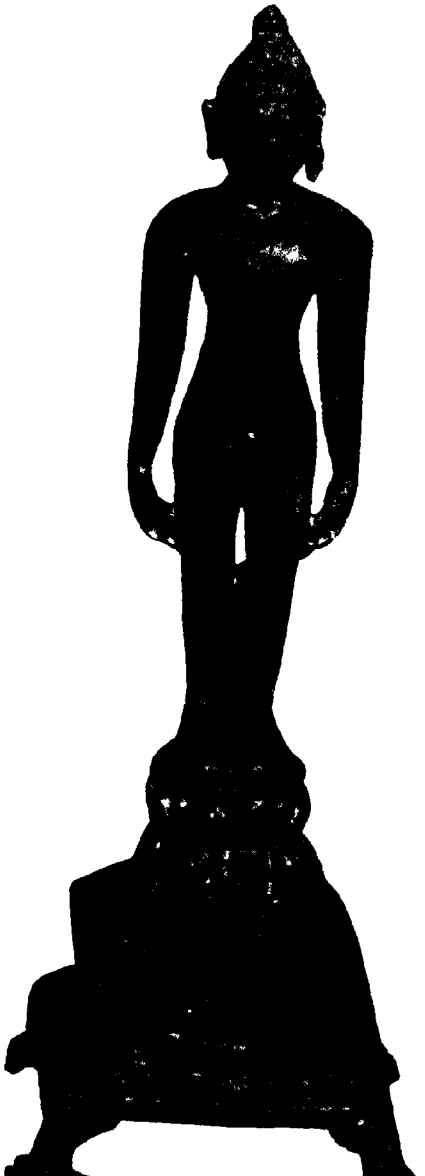
Mahavira, Vaibharagiri, Rajagrha
Mediaeval



Mahavira, Vaibharagiri, Rajagrha
Late Mediaeval



Mahavira, Pakbirra, Purulia
C. 9th Century A.D.



Mahavira, Bronze
Nunia, Jhargram, Midnapur
C. 11th Century A.D.



Mahavira, Biccavol, Andhra
C 10th Century A D.



Mahavira, Badami, Cave No 4
7th-8th Century A D



Mahavira, Gaon Mandir, Pavapuri
Late Mediaeval



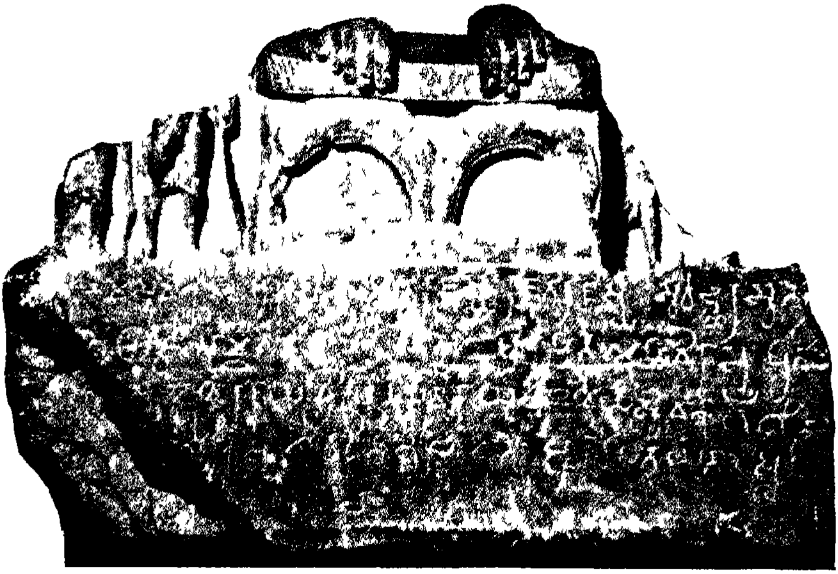
Mahavira, Candangaon Mahavir, near Jaipur
C. 10th Century A.D.



Mahavira, Kankali Tila, Mathura
2nd-3rd Century A.D.



Mahavira, Kankali Tila, Mathura
3rd-4th Century A D.



A Pedestal of the image of Mahavira dated s 299, Mathura



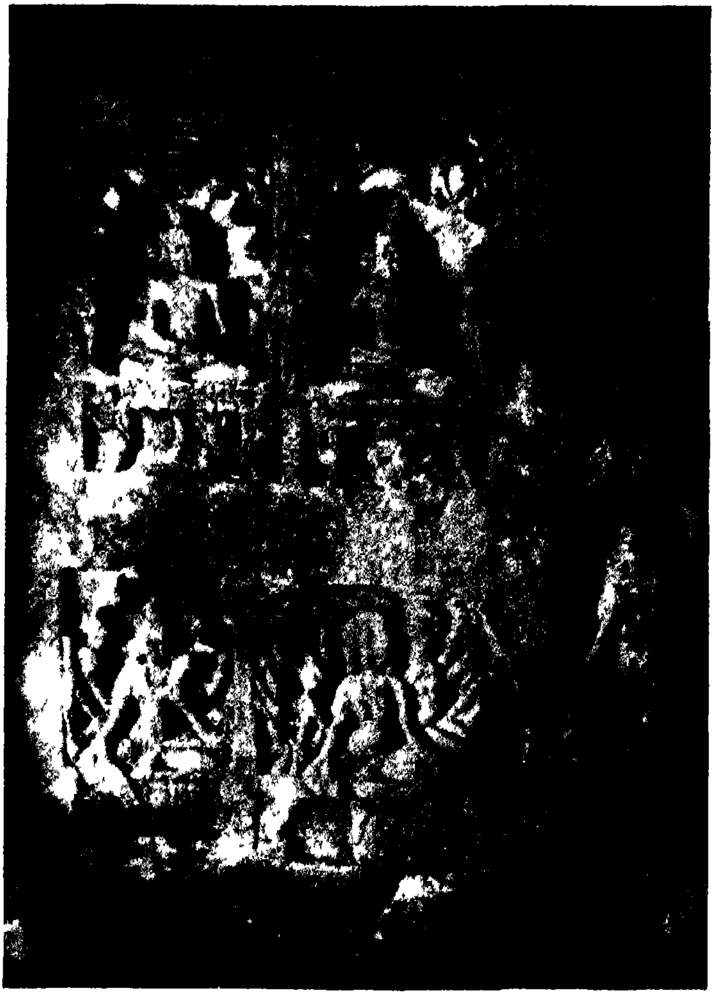
B Detail of the inscription giving date



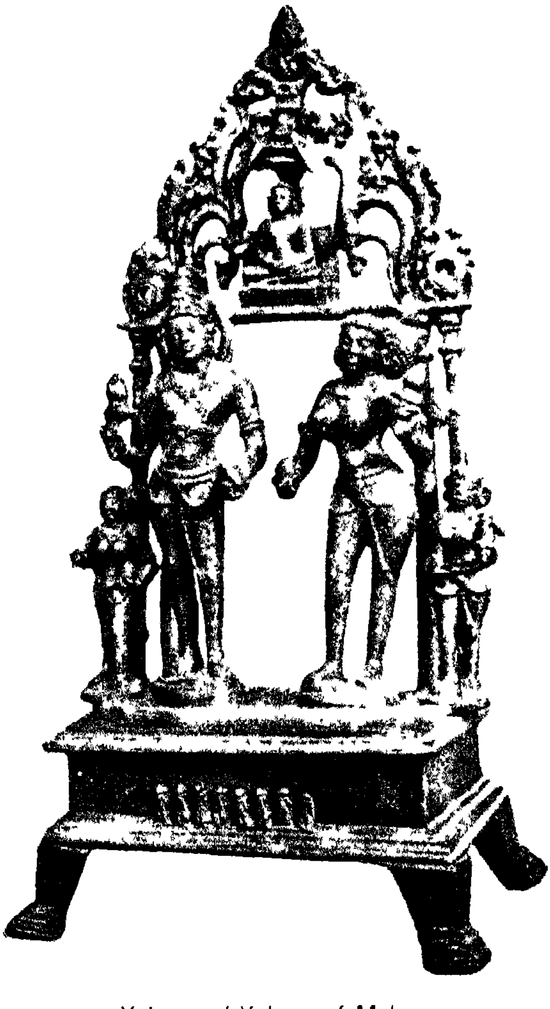
Mahavira, Tripuri, near Jabalpur
C 10th Century A D



Caumukha with Jinas, Pakbirra, Purulia
C. 11th Century A.D.



Parsvanatha and Mahavira with their Sasanadevis
Barabhuji Gumpha, Khandagiri, Orissa
C. 11th Century A.D.



Yaksa and Yaksini of Mahavira
Rajnapur-Khinkini, Vidarbha
Calukya style

Better is he who restraineth self,
though giveth no alms, than he who
giveth thousands and thousands of cows
every month but restraineth not his self.

—LORD MAHAVIRA

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